

## 'Crabby Old Man' Poem – Makes You Think

By Paula Dirkes | June 4, 2010



Greetings,

Several years ago when I worked at a local metropolitan hospital, I had the responsibility of conducting an experiential training program called 'Into Aging Simulation' for hospital employees and volunteers. Each participant was assigned the role of an elderly person who had a particular 'Life Script' that would play out over the course of the 90 minute program – whether they wanted it to or not. It was a pretty amazing program because it really caused people to notice how elderly patients and visitors were treated (for better and for worse) and we had some rather animated discussions during the debrief at the end.

When I trained IAS facilitators to help me put on this program, I gave them a copy of a poem that gave them some insight about what it's like to be an elderly person, from the perspective of the elderly person. The poem below is very similar to the one I used to use. Since my 'second Dad' Jack just died last week in a nursing home, and since my siblings and I are discussing our own Mother's care right now, the poem is even more meaningful.

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*When an old man died in the geriatric ward of a nursing home in North Platte, Nebraska, it was believed that he had nothing left of any value.*

*Later, when the nurses were going through his meager possessions, they found this poem. Its quality and content so impressed the staff that copies were made and distributed to every nurse in the hospital. One nurse took her copy to Missouri.*

*The old man's sole bequest to posterity has since appeared in the Christmas edition of the News Magazine of the St. Louis Association for Mental Health. A slide presentation has also been made based on his simple, but eloquent, poem.*

*And this little old man, with nothing left to give to the world, is now the author of this 'anonymous' poem winging across the Internet.*

### **Crabby Old Man**

What do you see nurses? . . . . . What do you see?

What are you thinking . . . . . when you're looking at me?

A crabby old man . . . . . not very wise,

Uncertain of habit . . . . . with faraway eyes?

Who dribbles his food . . . . . and makes no reply.

When you say in a loud voice . . . . . 'I do wish you'd try!'

Who seems not to notice . . . . . the things that you do.

And forever is losing . . . . . A sock or shoe?

Who, resisting or not . . . . . lets you do as you will,

With bathing and feeding . . . . . The long day to fill?

Is that what you're thinking? . . . . . Is that what you see?

Then open your eyes, nurse . . . . . you're not looking at me.

I'll tell you who I am. . . . . As I sit here so still,

As I do at your bidding, . . . . . as I eat at your will.

I'm a small child of Ten . . . . . with a father and mother,

Brothers and sisters . . . . . who love one another.

A young boy of Sixteen . . . . . with wings on his feet.

Dreaming that soon now . . . . . a lover he'll meet.

A groom soon at Twenty . . . . . my heart gives a leap.  
Remembering, the vows . . . . . that I promised to keep.  
At Twenty-Five, now . . . . . I have young of my own.  
Who need me to guide . . . . . And a secure happy home.  
A man of Thirty . . . . . My young now grown fast,  
Bound to each other . . . . . With ties that should last.  
At Forty, my young sons . . . . . have grown and are gone,  
But my woman's beside me . . . . . to see I don't mourn.  
At Fifty, once more, babies play 'round my knee,  
Again, we know children . . . . . My loved one and me.  
Dark days are upon me . . . . . my wife is now dead.  
I look at the future . . . . . shudder with dread.  
For my young are all rearing . . . . . young of their own.  
And I think of the years . . . . . and the love that I've known  
I'm now an old man . . . . . and nature is cruel.  
Tis jest to make old age . . . . . look like a fool.  
The body, it crumbles . . . . . grace and vigor, depart.  
There is now a stone . . . . . where I once had a heart.  
But inside this old carcass . . . . . a young guy still dwells,  
And now and again . . . . . my battered heart swells.  
I remember the joys . . . . . I remember the pain.  
And I'm loving and living . . . . . life over again.  
I think of the years, all too few . . . . . gone too fast.  
And accept the stark fact . . . . . that nothing can last.  
So open your eyes, people . . . . . open and see.  
Not a crabby old man . . . Look closer . . . see ME!!

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Take care of yourself,

Paula

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#### 4 Responses to “‘Crabby Old Man’ Poem – Makes You Think”

1. [Lisa Says:](#)  
[September 22nd, 2010 at 3:23 pm](#)

After reading your whole article I really started to think about what we are doing about our lives what we are giving to other and what we are taking. Thanks for great read!

2. [Paula Dirkes Says:](#)  
[September 22nd, 2010 at 4:11 pm](#)